



## PROCESSES OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY IN CULTURALLY HETEROGENEOUS CITIES ON THE EXAMPLES OF BIAŁYSTOK AND LUBLIN<sup>1</sup>

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The article presents the results of empirical research concerning the collective memory in Białystok and Lublin – two largest cities in the Eastern Poland. Before World War II they were multi-ethnic cities with big and important communities of Poles, Jews, Germans, Ukrainians and Belarusians. Their contemporary ethnic structure was formed as a result of World War II, in particular the Holocaust, post-war border shifts and intense migration from the countryside to the city in the next decades. Both Białystok and Lublin are an example of the typical cities in Central and Eastern Europe, which after World War II the memory politics was built on in the completely new political and social circumstances. We aim to confront the contemporary official memory of the cities, transmitted by major public institutions and the vernacular memories of their present inhabitants.

**Keywords:** Białystok and Lublin, collective memory, digital memory, local memory, memory politics.

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### Introduction

Collective memory as a popular concept in the contemporary social studies stems mainly from the landmark study of Maurice Halbwachs, *The Social Frameworks of Memory* (1925), in which he stated that “It is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories” (Halbwachs 1992: 38). Nevertheless, the popularity of collective memory

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studies, which aim is to investigate the images of the past *living* in modern societies is much younger and connects with so-called “memory boom” of recent decades (at least in Western societies) (Winter 2006). Various answers appeared in order to explain this rise of interest in the past most of which linked it with postmodernity, multiculturalism and decline of nation states. No matter the explanations are, the truth is that collective memory recently became not only an academic topic but also an issue of political and public reflection.

Contemporary European reflection on collective memory often links it with themes of “common European history” and “European collective memory”. Such themes are accompanied by political attempts to build an European identity and strengthen the legitimacy of supranational institutions, particularly the European Union (EU), however, they are facing many difficulties and adversities.

The enlargement of EU in 2004 made it clear that the search for universals of collective memory or consistent interpretations of Europe’s most important historical events is meeting severe difficulties between “old” and “new” Europe. What is more, the “memory boom” in Europe since 1980s (which in “young” Europe is also intertwined with the rise and further development of civil societies), results in flourishing of communities which bring up their collective memories and their own narratives to public discourses. Sometimes these communities are conflicting or competing against the dominant official memory of nation states. Therefore, a multitude of European collective memories is a political challenge both on national and supranational levels. On the latter, one can recall ideas, such as Maria Mälksoo’s “new Orientalism”, which suggests that Western Europe would become a post-modern, while Eastern Europe would remain modern, struggling with its anti-russian collective memory (Mälksoo 2010). On the other hand, this situation is stimulating for the various disciplines of social sciences interested in collective memory issues, that is sociology, social psychology, historiography, philosophy, political sciences, but also, for example literary criticism.

It seems that in the situation of the multitude of European collective memories and profound differences in the interpretation of historical events (the best example being the Second World War, the role of Nazism and Stalinism or Holocaust), effective strategy to seek consensus in the scientific, public and political discourses on memory is to investigate collective memories at their local, regional and interregional levels in order to seek commonalities and discussing the differences. One example of recent successful operating on interregional level is project “Polish-German Remembrance Sites” (*Deutsch-polnische Erinnerungsorte; Polsko-niemieckie miejsca pamięci*) conducted by Polish and German social researchers, in which important elements of Polish and German collective memories are compared, discussed and translated.

This paper focuses on the issues of collective memory in the communities of the two largest cities in the Eastern Poland, and therefore operates on a local level. Our findings relate to a specific area: the city of multicultural history. The collective memory is so in this case the *place memory* – refers to a specific area and is associated with specific activities commemorating different interpretations of the past (Wójcik *et al.* 2010).

However, it seems that the experiences collected below can be used as a comparison, or a starting point for studies of many other communities in Central and Eastern Europe, where modern ethno-demographic structure is largely the result of processes associated with World War II (experiences of both German and Soviet occupation and Holocaust) and the period immediately after the war (resettlement as the effect of borders shift). Local collective memories described in this article are not totally unique, but they are a part of the experience of inhabitants of the region, which in his important and inspiring book, Timothy Snyder described as *Bloodlands* (Snyder 2010). The contemporary local collective memory was highly influenced by the events of the great European History, and therefore it is a brick in the construction of (postulated) common history of Europe and a link between individual memories and collective European memory.

It is known that the conception of social memory is not precise in the field of social sciences, therefore the first step is to define the most important terms used below. Collective memory is here understood, as Barbara Szacka stated, as “[a collection of] perceptions of members of the community about its past, populated with characters and past events that have taken place in it, as well as ways of remembrance and knowledge transfer claimed to be mandatory equipment of group members. In other words, <...> all conscious references to the past, which are present in the current collective life” (Szacka 2006: 19). What is often used by Polish public discourse for the sake public actions in the field of collective memory, often uses the term “historical politics”. However, to emphasize that the phenomena described below relate not so much to actual historical events or processes, but rather to forms of their commemoration (or oblivion), we use the concept of “memory politics” instead. Memory politics, will therefore be defined as “actions that an individual [or, more broadly – a group or community] intentionally take in public, in order to strengthen the collective memory of citizens, or to change it” (Nijakowski 2008: 44). In this article we use term “multicultural” in relation to cultural (ethnic and religious) diversity of the cities in the past and the present. The concept of multiculturalism is used in literature and journalism in very different senses. It can be understood – as we do – as a form of diversification of the social structure, but often it determines the type of policy, which assumes equality between ethnic / national, cultural or religious entities. The objective of such policy is to allow access to desirable social, economic and cultural goods for all social groups. In our case, we shall speak of multicultural local memory as a hypothesis, the results of research show that it still is rather a postulate than reality.

### Memory politics in ethnic heterogeneous cities

General frameworks of local memory politics are determined by goals and activities of local authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), informal groups or individuals (city dwellers) in the area of commemorating (or forgetting) past events, places and historical figures. In practice, it revolves around a calendar of important anniversaries and celebrations; physical memorials – statues, monuments, cemeteries,

street names; publications – scientific, popular, tourist; educational campaigns, museums and art exhibitions, etc. The main topics of local memory politics often can be transferred from the national level, particularly if the political balance of local authorities is a copy of the parliamentary party system. Still, the local politics are also peculiar, influenced by the community past. This will be a major concern of this article.

Białystok and Lublin at the outbreak of World War II were culturally heterogeneous cities with large communities of Poles, Jews, Germans, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Russians. The extermination of Jews during the war, the post-war Eastern border shift and the exchange of people, as well as a broad stream of migration from rural areas to city centers resulted in a radical change of social structure of the cities. Furthermore, it limited the social memory of the pre-war past. This does not change the fact that the period of multiculturalism, even though practically at its end, had left permanent, material and symbolic heritage in Białystok and Lublin, which became one of the main factors organizing local memory politics. Paradoxically, that way it is better suited for official commemoration, as it is almost beyond the horizons of private, vernacular memory.

In both cities the official memory of multiculturalism is now a source of pride. Both refer to it in their development strategies, marketing, and attempts to create modern, coherent urban identities. Similar actions take place in some of the local NGOs. “Pride of multiculturalism” strategy meets different objections, though. Some critics draw attention to the lack of reflection of official memory, weak discourse of local history, treating multiculturalism as mere folklore, marginalizing the traumatic period of actual decline of multiculturalism or on the other hand, especially in the case of Jewish community, reducing the past of this group mainly to the history of Holocaust. Taking national-Catholic positions, others criticize contemporary popularization of the multicultural past, seeing it as a threat to the memory of dominant groups. The most glaring results of these fears are acts of aggression against memorial sites of minority groups (such as vandalism on Jewish cemeteries in Białystok), or persons associated with spreading of the idea of multiculturalism (center Brama Grodzka – Teatr NN in Lublin, as well as people: Dariusz Libionka, Tomasz Pietrasiewicz; disruption of Tolerance March in Białystok in 2011).

### Collective memory in the applications for the contest of European Capital of Culture (ECC) 2016

Main topics of local discourses and the climate around the past of multicultural cities seem to be good indicators of contemporary Białystok and Lublin inhabitants’ attitudes towards the past, especially before years 1944/45. Not only are those attitudes a state of their knowledge of past events, but also emotions associated with it and real actions in the public space. This shows the main differences between official and vernacular local memories. What makes some sort of thesauruses of official memory, both in Białystok and Lublin, are applications submitted for the contest of ECC 2016. These applications, created in 2010, included not only the proposed cultural of-

fer (which often refers to local history), but also a description of the most important monuments and calendars of major historical events since the foundation of cities. A glimpse at the content of applications gives a picture of past as seen through the eyes of local authorities and part of third sector that actively participated in the competition procedure. Anticipating the analysis of their content, it is worth noting that application of Lublin – as opposed to that of Białystok – reached the finals of Polish candidate cities. This may prove (although this is only a hypothesis) a more coherent and better acknowledged official memory in Lublin.

As mentioned earlier, the applications of both cities contain explicit references to the multicultural past as their *genius loci*. However, attention must be paid to different attitudes towards the past. One of the key words in Białystok application is **co-existence**, which is a statement of presence (physical or symbolic) of many cultures. According to the authors of document, achievement of the past is “the art of coexistence of diversity, art of living together” (*Wniosek aplikacyjny...* 2010: 5), which is a necessary condition for peaceful living of many cultural and ethnic groups that eventually make up the added value. Meanwhile, Lublin application does not stop at finding coexistence of cultures, but highlights its dynamic aspect, the **dialogue** between them, which only may turn into a real and unique value or, in other words, social capital. This arrangement corresponds with the observation of Zygmunt Bauman, who writes that the paradigm of multiculturalism (praising the mere existence of different cultures) is less effective or even harmful to community, in contrast to rational dialogue between cultures (Bauman 2011: 71–87). Static definition of the cultural heterogeneity in the Białystok application has further consequences. It emphasizes the role of Białystok as – both today and in the past – the **borderland** city. Meanwhile, Lublin operates a metaphor of the **bridge**, which is actually a dynamic development of the idea of the border. In contrast to Białystok, Lublin does not appear as a potential place of material and symbolic transfers between ethnic groups (or states), but as an active entity that generates such transfers and furthermore, that generated it in the past. The best example is the Union of Lublin (1569), crucial for the local memory. Such a static definition of Białystok multiculturalism may seem paradoxical when one considers that – opposite to Lublin – there is actual cultural heterogeneity there. It is estimated that about 17–20% of the population is Orthodox (Sadowski 2006: 163). On closer look, however, it turns out that when it comes to collective memory, or social perception of its architectural monuments (Białous 2011), communities live separately – coexist, but without consensus. Therefore, local memory politics do not go beyond the officially declared pride of coexistence.

### Local memory politics in Białystok

Memory politics in Białystok, after democratic changes of 1989, which allowed political and cultural pluralism, manifested itself in public space in naming of streets, organization of cultural festivals and commemoration events (after politically retouched calendar of important dates), funding new memorial sites and working on new

attitudes towards pre-existing. All in all, politics, in spite of the apparent liberalism associated with the praise of multiculturalism, in the last two decades seemed to be rather conservative in form of commemoration events, especially those of importance to the minorities points of view (Orthodox, Belarusians), or groups no longer existent in Białystok (Jews, Germans).

The main direction of local memory politics, mutually reinforcing the collective memory of modern Białystokers, is to highlight the period of the second half of 18th century, when Białystok, as a private town of Jan Klemens Branicki, experienced a period of prosperity. While earlier in the communist period, the Branicki's Palace also was considered symbol of the city in a variety of popular and tourist publications; the figure of Branicki was portrayed more ambivalently because of aristocratic descent. After 1989, this period is presented solely as a positive, almost utopian (such connotations bring the typical for tourist guides narrative of private, modern, almost self-sufficient town. It is also visible in the application for ECC). Local authorities have initiated renovation of the palace complex. Some streets were renamed (Branicki street Instead of Lenin street, Palace street Instead of Julian Marchlewski street), highlighting the bond of the modern city with its former owner. Celebrating Branicki's name day entered calendar of Białystok festivals for good. However, official discourse on that period, including the application for ECC, at most times does not state clearly the fact that Białystok was actually culturally heterogeneous city back then. A private town utopia praised in official memory marginalizes German or Jewish communities, economically dependent on Branicki's court, still, culturally autonomous.

The official discourse only randomly commemorates events or characters associated with the 19th century past, especially its second half, a period when Białystok as the "Manchester of the North" has developed industrially, and was a truly multicultural city. After 1989, and especially since the Esperanto Congress in Białystok (2009), it is only the creator of the language, L. L. Zamenhof, of Białystok origin, who is consistently and comprehensively commemorated. What was the culmination of this change, was funding, with the participation of local authorities, culturally important Centre of L. L. Zamenhof. L. L. Zamenhof's life and achievements are now being used as an example of the undoubted benefits of multiculturalism. Except that, the official memory of 19th and first half of 20th century is random, inconsistent, and often controversial. For instance commemoration of Białystok born filmmaker Dziga Vertov due to his later work in the Soviet Union; restored inter-war monument of Kawelin the Dog, that has a name of well-known tsarist officer resulted in protests of the Russian minority). Almost entirely forgotten are German and Belarusian communities. Only after decades of oblivion and devastation, were remains of Lutheran cemetery at Wygoda district saved, as local authorities have arranged lapidary there (1994–1996). More recently, in 2010, authorities have made the commemoration of the oldest protestant cemetery in the city, which after the war was completely obliterated. The remains of the graves were moved to another place. The policy towards wooden districts is a constant field of conflict in Białystok, as these are among the most recognizable monuments of the 19th century past. Its attractive location on the city map makes

the attitude of local authorities, especially after year 1989, ambiguous and it varies between projects of comprehensive protection and modernization. Meanwhile, in the absence of a coherent decision, the historic structure of districts is disturbed by modern architecture, which seems to be controversial to city dwellers (27.9% of Białystok respondents believe that the old wooden buildings are now neglected, but deserves to be protected). The memory of Jewish community in the local politics is limited primarily to the war and occupation period, the earlier fate of Jewish people have been completely obliterated until recently. For several years there have been local third sector initiatives that have been celebrating the pre-war Jewish life in Białystok (such as project “Golden Matzeva”, Zachor Festival and Jewish Heritage Trail). However, even the most important places commemorating the Holocaust – a monument of the Great Synagogue, burned by the Nazis in 1941 and a memorial and symbolic cemetery of Białystok ghetto uprising, although located within the city centre, are rather hidden places, not easy to find and unknown to many city dwellers (of course, their locations cannot explain completely why citizens are lacking interest in them). Similarly, what is marginal in local memory calendar, at least from the point of view of residents, are anniversaries of Białystok ghetto uprising.

These are signs, showing that in the local memory politics positively valued multiculturalism is merely a slogan. It is difficult to find public commemorative activities that define the past of Białystok, as a time when different ethnic or cultural groups were living together, creating real community and public sphere of the city. Even promoting the memory of L. L. Zamenhof does not go with the promotion of his ideas or even Esperanto language, which for most Białystokers remains unknown. The idea of multiculturalism in local memory politics is therefore somehow anachronistic (it relates to past only within present frames) and unreflective, which is a possible result of post-war changes in the social structure of the city. Memory is usually attributed to the perception of majority group (Branicki’s Białystok as ethnically homogeneous city), and even if minority groups are commemorated, they are still often marginalized in public areas. A survey among residents indicated that while almost all Białystok citizens (98.4%) believe that it is important to know the history of their city, more than half (58.1%) believe that there is not enough of local history in public discourse.

### Local memory politics in Lublin

Slightly different is the case of Lublin, where the official memory increased focus on the active aspect of cultural heterogeneity and where it can be more easily anchored in past events, like the development of Lublin during the Renaissance, a vibrant cultural (rather than economic) activity of Jewish community and – mentioned above – the Union of Lublin. Of course, the architecture of Lublin, with well-preserved and walled old town makes it tangible commemorative space that cannot be so easily modified, or blurred, as in Białystok.

It is also worth noting that while the World War II and social processes arising directly from it had decisive influence on modern cities structures, social reflection

dedicated to these processes are minimal. Some sort of official statement can only be found in Lublin application form to the ECC, where it has been explicitly noted that the city of Lublin was harmed during the war and Holocaust and also that the post-war border shift, that put city close to the Soviet Union, paralyzed normal development. It is difficult, however, to state clearly, if this statement is corresponding with vivid collective memory, and to what extent it is a mere marketing technique – the granting of the ECC title would be in this context a remedy for Lublin or, at least, help in its future development. Similarly, Lublin, opposite to Białystok, directly admit its contemporary rural roots in the mentioned application.

### Digital local memory

One of the most important sources for obtaining information on local history is internet (in our study 42% of respondents in Białystok and 31% in Lublin reported the internet as their primary source of knowledge about the past of the city). These results are confirmed in a nationwide PBI study in 2009 and 2011, which showed that 93% of Internet users aged 18–54 years derive knowledge of their location (region) from the internet. It is currently the most frequently chosen source of information on this topic. In 2011, local history was the subject searched by 35% of respondents. For the purposes of this study two types of local cyber memory were analyzed: official (analysis of the history and chronology on the official websites of the cities) and vernacular (analysis of *Wikipedia* articles). An additional element, which was preliminary analyzed, are other forms of cyber memory, such as blogs, social media and discussion forums. The choice of *Wikipedia* articles is due to two major reasons. First, the historical websites are frequently visited and *Wikipedia* has been for many years the most popular educational portal in Poland (*Megapanel...* 2012). That can be confirmed by the statistics on “History of Białystok” and “History of Lublin” articles entries (*Historia Białegostoku* 2013; *Historia Lublina* 2013). Secondly, *Wikipedia* is a bottom-up project, edited by many people, still it developed content control mechanisms such as: login, content authorization, administrators, verification mechanisms, etc. Therefore, *Wikipedia* articles are good indicators of informal, local civic memory.

Local memory associated with unofficial discourse is extremely diverse, it breaks the stem of official memory. This is the most democratic, giving the opportunity to individuals or groups for bottom-up creation of local memory discourse. It operates in two basic forms: a short narrative, associated with the selected episodes and periods of the history (e.g. as thematic routes, short documentaries), and in the form of databases, which Lev Manovich describes as “a set of elements, on which the user can perform various operations: view, navigate, search” (Manovich 2006: 334). This is completely different from linear experience of reading books or watching a movie. In this form, data is dominated by visual messages: in most cases these are popular collections of archival photos or postcards. Most photos are described by administrators, but still, they do provoke exchange of opinions, polemics and information. Sometimes this takes crowd-sourcing forms of collecting information about the history of indi-

vidual objects, characters and events (projects of this type in Poland, which are professionally administrated are, for instance, Virtual Shtetl portal or one of the newest sites of this type: the Open Monuments project).

Comparison of historical narratives that organize the “History of the City” and “Calendar” on the official website of the cities with articles from *Wikipedia* shows a lot of differences. In case of the official websites of Białystok, marginalizing of past multiculturalism can be seen. Despite the fact that up to days of World War II, Jews made up at least half of the city population, their community is mentioned only on two occasions: the pogrom of 1906 and funding of the Great Synagogue. Surprisingly, contribution of Jewish and German residents of Białystok in its economic development and culture is omitted, while the same topics are explored in many of informal local history websites, such as blogs and archival photograph galleries. In the official narrative, the local history of Jews appears only when discussing World War II, in a way symptomatic for most of the analyzed web communications narratives. Holocaust is put into the narrative in a way that disturbs the chronology of events: persecution of the Jewish inhabitants of Białystok is separated from the main narrative. There is no clear link between the events associated with Jews and the rest of population of the city (e.g. what were the relationships between the Jewish and Polish citizens?). Post-war past – and that applies to the vast majority of narratives in the local cyber memory – of Jews and other minority groups is completely silenced. The history of post-war multicultural Białystok is therefore a blank spot, both in official as well as unofficial sites. Of course, it could be a result of lesser – compared to the pre-war period – ethnic diversity in Białystok, but it rather seems to be a consequence of the established oblivion on Holocaust survivors and marginalization of memory of Orthodox, usually rural migrants. The latter seems to be rather a part of the shame memory and is linked with the strategy of hiding their rural origins by the contemporary Białystok dwellers. Then, there are ambiguous and still not sealed Polish-Belarusian relations from the period of the Soviet occupation in the years 1939–1941 and the contribution of minorities in the construction of a post-war political system. Definitely it can be concluded that the history of Białystok on the official city websites is extremely polonocentric and largely ignores the contribution of other national groups in the development of the city.

The case of Lublin is different: here one can easily see an attempt to bond the official narrative with the idea of multiculturalism. Hypothetically, one can assume that this strategy had a direct relationship with the ECC application. Official websites present the multicultural past explicitly (there is even a dedicated section entitled “Multiculturalism and religious diversity”), sometimes using a very peculiar style for presentation of history, which is more suitable for advertising folder: “The rich history and a multicultural melting pot are special qualities [of Lublin]. This is particularly reflected in the diverse architecture, topography, and also social and cultural development. All of these features give a unique local flavour of our city, making it very attractive not only for tourists, but also filmmakers who will find plenty of inspiration for their projects” (*Historia miasta* 2008). Nevertheless, article “Lublin as a multicultural city” has been consistently placed in the narrative and woven into it ever since

medieval past. Most information (characteristically, in a very general style, with no details and not mentioning the field of culture) can be found in a separate section on multiculturalism, which makes the subject separated from the mainstream story about the city's past. Peculiarly, in the official description there is no information on the interwar period, which was – in all of Poland at the time – an unique period of cultural development of Polish Jewry. World War II narrative goes in two directions: Holocaust and the Polish resistance movement. As for such an important period, the paragraphs are very brief. What is analyzed extensively in local history, though, and what is quite unusual at the same time, is recent history. One can see here a creation of new “sites of memory” (*lieux de memoire*) – Lublin as one of cradles of the “Solidarity” movement and the positive influence of Catholic Church to sustain political resistance against the communist regime.

*Wikipedia* articles, which were selected as indicators of informal, bottom-up local memory clearly differ from official narratives analyzed above. *Wiki* history of Białystok definitely provides more information about the Jewish influence on the development of the city, however Jewish history is still separated from the main narrative. It seems incomprehensive with the quote from article on L. L. Zamenhof that states: “the creation of a universal language was an obvious idea in Białystok, which in the second half of the 19th century was populated **mostly by Jews**, as well as Poles, Russians, Germans, and in a smaller number Belarusians, Tatars and Lithuanians”. This majority of Jewish community in 19th century (until 1920s) is not seen in mainstream narrative. If one agrees with the fact of Jewish majority, why is information about it in a separate section? Who, then, is a subject of the main narrative which is being told?

*Wikipedia* entry on the history of Lublin is different. Pre-war history of Lublin is actually composed of interconnected, national or religious groups stories. Jews are equally involved in the past of the city. Narrative gives a sense of pride in the achievements of Jewish community as well as Protestants, who are treated as “obvious” inhabitants of Lublin. The narrative is disturbed only – as was also evident in previous examples – in the description of World War II. In this part of the article, there is a very long paragraph on Polish martyrdom. The Holocaust is almost omitted, there is only one fragment: “October 1, 1942 was a great street round-up, which caused terror among the inhabitants of Lublin, who were expecting mass deportations, **just as it was before** with the Jewish population”. But there was anything about earlier incident in the article. Holocaust is thus once again treated as a separate chapter. Noteworthy is the beginning, which suddenly appears with the name “Polish citizens of Jewish nationality” – although previously authors written about the Jews. Is this a conscious strategy to create – Polish, civic suffering community that goes beyond ethnic or religious differences? Or is it just a cliché frequently used in a post-war discourse that expresses the distance from the Jews rather than a sense of community? In the after-war period, narrative about the Jews or Protestants symptomatically disappears without a trace. Especially in case of Jewish community it equals with omitting an important chapter of recreating Jewish community in post-war Poland. At the time, Lublin

was one of the most important centers of the first post-war Jewish organization – the Central Committee of Polish Jews, which task was to register and to help survivors of the Holocaust. *Wikipedians* formed, however, a separate article containing this information, under the title “History of the Jews in Lublin”. There is no corresponding information in the case of Białystok.

In summary, it can be seen that the attitude towards ethnic diversity in most digital memory narratives takes three forms:

- Facts omitted or included selectively in the narrative – this is particularly the case of Jewish history in Białystok;
- Domination of Holocaust, with inadequately described influence of the Jewish community in pre-war period;
- Disturbed chronology; history of Jews and other minority groups are excluded from the main narrative in the form of separate sub-sections or paragraphs.

In fact, local memory is functioning as separate stories that sometimes get together, but do not form a coherent whole.

### The dwellers’ social memory

The survey carried out in both cities resulted in an interesting picture of local memory of Białystok and Lublin dwellers. Characteristically, it is largely a memory “remembered” through the prism of national history. This is a classic type of collective memory called “region-nation” (Szpociński 2006), in which local memory elements are important because of their close links with what is important in the national memory. This memory is still anchored to the World War II – this period is identified as the most important topic of family conversations about the past (40% responses in Białystok, 30% in Lublin). But at the same time local history, is also a frequent topic (20% of respondents from Białystok and 25% from Lublin indicated conversations on the “history, development and appearance of the city”). It can be connected with contemporarily increasing sense of belonging to the place of living, as well as the effect of return of locality and constructing the cities’ identities in public discourse, especially in media (also in the context of creating territorial marketing campaigns), seeking *genius loci* of both cities.

In our study, respondents seem to be aware that both Lublin and Białystok were in past multicultural cities as well as that the Jews constituted a high percentage of the population (in Lublin as much as 96% of respondents identified Jews as former city inhabitants, in Białystok such indication was made by 84% of respondents). However, actual knowledge of the multicultural past proved to be extremely superficial, and collective memory highly polonocentric.

Local memory politics is also reflected in the commemoration and forgetting such events and characters from the past that are, or may be a common reason for pride or shame. These characters and events, if we understand them as “sites of memory”, are the points around which local collective memory and identity of the city are crystalized, around which the general population or specific groups integrate. Both the real actions in public space as well as survey showed that in both cities – and especially

Białystok – collective memory seems to be short and random. It goes back beyond year 1945 only in several cases, towards iconic characters and events. Białystokers are obviously proud of Branicki period. 19th century, does not bring any positive connotations, besides L. L. Zamenhof, even though at that time Białystok became a real city and an important industrial centre. Similarly ignored is the interwar period. In 20th century, only resistance movement against the Soviet and German occupation during World War II is a source of pride, but it does not connect with any specific figures. Similarly, in Lublin, between the 16th century (Renaissance and Union of Lublin) and World War II, there is a huge gap in the collective memory, or at least the inability to take any stance to past events, which practically means the same. Beyond the realm of positive memories of the inhabitants are largely periods of actual multiculturalism, which officially are a source of pride of the local authorities.

When it comes to best-remembered and recognizable historical figures in Białystok, besides Branicki, his wife Izabela and L. L. Zamenhof, one need to add Ryszard Kaczorowski, the person who is an example of modern memory recovery. The figure of Kaczorowski, last Polish president in exile, was brought into public awareness after the transfer of pre-war presidential insignia to Lech Wałęsa in 1990, has become a figure intensively commemorated in Białystok especially after his tragic death in a plane crash near Smolensk in 2010. Since then, his name has received one of the major streets in the city centre and the university library has a permanent exhibition dedicated to him (in addition, 23% of those surveyed in July and August 2010 in Białystok stated Kaczorowski as a person worthy of the monument). Importantly, collective memory of events and famous residents of both cities, does not really go beyond the official memory, nor stands in opposition to it, nor breaks through the polonocentric narrative. In Lublin, where commemoration of multiculturalism is a stronger trend, when asked about famous historical figures associated with the city, nearly all mentioned by the respondents were Poles. A few representatives of other groups, such as Yasha Mazur – The Magician of Lublin, and Jacob Horowitz – the Seer of Lublin remained in the background, considered to be famous for, respectively, 4.3% and 4.1% of respondents. Both Białystok and Lublin respondents believe that the history of cities is primarily Polish (respectively 59.9% and 76.6%). Finally, some of today's population denied minority groups the right to commemorate their own versions of history if they put the Poles (Catholics) in a bad light. Among the respondents in Białystok were 27.8% of such persons, in Lublin 31.4%.

Interesting results can be found on the memory of shame as well. A symptomatic example of short and random collective memory of Białystok dwellers is the fact that almost one third of respondents who were able to indicate the historical figures that may be a cause of shame, pointed Branicki family, usually associating it with the notorious Confederation of Targowica (1792). In fact, one of its co-founders was Franciszek Ksawery Branicki, however he came from a different branch of the family (Franciszek Ksawery coat-of-arms was Korczak, while Jan Klemens' coat-of-arms Gryf) and never had nothing to do with Białystok. Periods of history or specific events indicated as a source of shame differ in both cities. In Lublin, shame is often associated with communist regime period, often with a short period of 1944 when the city was a temporary capital for the so called

Lublin's Poland, governed by the communists. Negative characters are party activists, representatives of local authorities at that time, agents of security forces. Personification of shameful memory of communism became a born there Bolesław Bierut. In Białystok memory of shame is clearly connected with an episode of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee of Poland (1920). Though, answer to this question is dominated by the World War II period, especially collaboration with the enemy (24.6% responses). Post-war period also appears, but it is not as significant as in the case of Lublin.

It is worth noting that these periods and events are in fact parts of a narrative memory of dominant group, the Poles-Catholics. The memory of national shame is proves to be much stronger than, for example, the memory of the Holocaust of the Jews. Even though in both cities were large ghettos, and in Lublin Majdanek extermination camp, respondents have pushed it into the background. In Białystok, in this context Holocaust was mentioned by 13.7% of respondents, 11.6% in Lublin. This results find confirmation in nationwide studies that prove the Holocaust is a marginalized memory element, even if associated with the World War II period. Similarly, as in the case of the cyber memory, it seems that Holocaust did not enter into national nor local memory as an important "site of memory".

## Conclusions

In conclusion, despite the changes of year 1989, which gave possibilities for political pluralism and heterogeneous collective memory (also used as a tool of territorial marketing), in both cities the memory of multiculturalism remains marginal, and its commemoration is not a priority for most of important social actors. Much as the local authorities use the concept of multicultural past more (Lublin) or less (Białystok) effectively, they do so in random and anachronic manner, excepting most topics that might be controversial from the point of view of the dominant group (such as a period of quantitative dominance of the Jewish population in Białystok). Contemporary inhabitants, mostly migrants from the countryside or their descendants, do not have their own private, vernacular memory of multicultural past. Authentically grassroots collective memory that is currently operating in public discourse – the memory of the Soviet occupation and deportation to the East in the years 1939–1941, the resistance against the occupiers and the opposition against the communist regime in the after-war period – are associated primarily with Polish narrative, and often national-Catholic. The activities of NGOs, including minority organizations are not strong enough to break through with their (often alternative) memory narratives into public awareness. And, if such processes take place, these are rather in the direction of narrowing memory perspectives into those of the dominant group, and not vice versa. One of good examples seems to be slogan arbitrarily placed by one of the veterans associations "God-Honour-Motherland" on the monument of the Heroes of Białystok Region, which they saw as a necessary act of decommunizing collective memory. Afterwards, their action was actually accepted by the municipal authorities, despite concerns not only of symbolic, but also legal nature. As it turns out, twenty years of democratization in

the collective memory changed a lot: more and more is told about its multicultural dimension, grassroots initiatives commemorating forgotten past are constantly forming. Still, these changes are relatively superficial for common consciousness, which is also hampered by the loud disputes in the field of memory politics of national level, with its huge role of polonocentric, traditional discourse of memory. It is not only a dispute about the past, or the memory, but on the shape of the Polish community: traditional and national, based on symbolic blood ties and common religion or civic, open and inclusive to culturally diverse groups.

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## KOLEKTYVINĖS ATMINTIES PROCESAI KULTŪRIŠKAI HETEROGENIŠKUOSE MIESTUOSE: BALSTOGĖS IR LIUBLINO ATVEJAI

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### Santrauka

Straipsnyje pristatomi Balstogės ir Liublino – dviejų didžiausių Rytų Lenkijos miestų kolektyvinės atminties empirinio tyrimo rezultatai. Prieš Antrąjį pasaulinį karą tai buvo daugiaetniniai miestai, turintys dideles ir svarbias lenkų, žydų, vokiečių, ukrainiečių ir baltarusių bendruomenes. Šių miestų šiuolaikinė struktūra susiformavo kaip Antrojo pasaulinio karo, ypač holokausto, sienų persislinkimų pokario metu ir vėlesniais dešimtmečiais vykusios intensyvios migracijos iš kaimo į miestus, rezultatas. Tiek Balstogė, tiek Liublinas yra tipiškai Vidurio ir Rytų Europos miestų pavyzdžiai, kurių atminties politika po Antrojo pasaulinio karo buvo kuriama visiškai naujomis politinėmis ir socialinėmis aplinkybėmis. Straipsnyje siekiama palyginti šiuolaikinę oficialią šių miestų atmintį, kurios reguliavimas perduotas pagrindinėms viešosioms institucijoms, ir dabartinių miestų gyventojų vietinės atmintis.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Balstogė ir Liublinas, kolektyvinė atmintis, skaitmeninė atmintis, vietinė atmintis, atminties politika.

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